DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 421 431 SO 029 079

AUTHOR	Morris, Ruth
TITLE	Women's Writing in India: An Adaptable Syllabus with Annotated Reading List. Fulbright-Hays Summer Seminars Abroad, 1997 (India).
SPONS AGENCY	United States Educational Foundation in India.
PUB DATE	1997-00-00
NOTE	12p.; For other curriculum project reports by 1997 seminar participants, see SO 029 067-086.
PUB TYPE	Guides - Classroom - Teacher (052) -- Reference Materials - Bibliographies (131)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	Annotated Bibliographies; Asian Studies; Bibliographies; Cultural Awareness; *Culture; Foreign Countries; Higher Education; *Indians; Modern History; Multicultural Education; Non Western Civilization; *Womens Studies; *World History
IDENTIFIERS	*India

ABSTRACT

This paper contains a course outline for a survey of writing by women from various time periods, geographic regions, and social classes of India. Particular attention is given to themes and issues concerning women's lives with readings on topics such as women's work, health and water, children, and religion. The reading list is arranged alphabetically into fiction and nonfiction sections with brief annotations about the contents of the books. (EH)

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by

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Curriculum Projects Developed by 1997 Seminar Participants

Submitted to
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O.P. Bhardwaj
USEFI
Fulbright House
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New Delhi, INDIA 110 001
Nov. 19, 1997

Dear O.P.:

I hope this finds you all in good health, good cheer and prospering. My warmest regards to all of y'all at USEFI.

Enclosed, finally, is my summer project. It has taken some time to come together, but at last, I send it on to you.

Had a little USEFI reunion last week. Kathy Wright came to visit and we took a nostalgic trip down memory lane, reliving our India trip with pictures and reminiscences. It was very nice to have a chance to "talk Indian" with a fellow traveler. It made me homesick for Ina Market and Lodi Gardens and the alleyways of Varanasi.

Cheers!

Ruth

Ruth Morris

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Women's Writing in India
An Adaptable Syllabus with Annotated Reading List

Description: A critical study of Indian women's writings, examined from historical, social, policital, and cultural points of view. Particular attention given to themes and issues concerning women's lives. Readings on topics such as women's work, health and water, children, religion. An exploration of feminist criticism as it is evinced in the Orient and compared to Occidental issues included.

Purpose: To acquaint students with the culture and history of India through the particular perspective of women. The course is a survey of writing by women from various time periods, geographic regions, and social classes of India.

Objectives: Students who successfully complete the course will demonstrate the skills required to accomplish the following objectives:

1. to list and discuss important characteristics of Indian women's literature
2. to associate literary works and genres with social, political and cultural issues of various periods and regions
3. to list and discuss writers and themes covered

4. to list and discuss writers' views as reflections of setting and vernacular

5. to define literary terms relevant to the works studied

6. to list and discuss historical, political, social, and cultural issues as they pertain to and influence the writing of Indian women.

Reading List:

Bhasin, Kamla and Nighat Said Khan. Some Questions on Feminism and its Relevance in South Asia. Kali for Women, 1996. ISBN 81-85107-14-9

An invaluable pamphlet for the analysis of oriental perspective on feminism.

Bumiller, Elisabeth. May You Be the Mother of a Hundred Sons: A Journey among the Women of India. Fawcett, 1990. ISBN 0-449-90614-0

A western journalist travels India to report on the status of her women. Revealing and compelling despite obvious bias.

Gandhi, Nandita and Nandita Shah. The Issues at Stake: Theory and Practice in the Contemporary Women's Movement in India. Kali for Women, 1992. ISBN 81-85107-22-X

A study of the trajectory of the women's movement in India with primary focus given to the third wave, 1980s through 90s. Documents varied methods in different parts of country including campaigns on violence, work, health, and legal issues. An assessment of the movement's vision of the future. A search for theoretical perspectives.

Jung, Anees. Unveiling India: A Woman's Journey. Penguin, 1987. ISBN 0-14-010344-9

A portrait of women today. Unremarkable women reveal with remarkable candor the condition of women in marriage, widowhood, work, sexual servitude, religion, poverty. Breaking the bonds of tradition, ritual, caste, these women celebrate Indian women.

Kabeer, Naila. Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought. Kali for Women, 1995. ISBN 81-85107-75-0

An analysis of mainstream development theory and the cognate issue of population control as these reveal the deeply entrenched biases which have marginalized women's needs. Looks at family and household as primary social construct and the resulting inadequacy of poverty line as measurement of development.

Kumar, Radha. The History of Doing: An Illustrated Account of Movements for Women's Rights and Feminism in India, 1800-1990. Kali for Women, 1997. ISBN 0-85107-76-9

A thematic study of the women's movement in India from 19th century to the present. Includes photographs, documents, excerpts from correspondence, books and informal writings. Raises questions about the nature of the contemporary movement, issues, directions and perspectives. Describes difference from western women's movement.

Nabar, Vrinda. Caste as Woman. Penguin, 1995. ISBN 0-14-025888-4

An assessment of the status of Indian women today. Addresses the issues of feminism and its struggle against entrenched patriarchy. Proposes the argument that gender is the equalizer to Indian women which overrides caste.

Pande, Mrinal. Devi: Tales of the Goddess in Our Time. Penguin, 1996.

ISBN 0-14-026549-X

Modern incarnations of the goddess are found in strong, passionate women who defy the confines of a male chauvinist world. The Devi is presented in myriad incarnations of contemporary women in Pande's life and family.

Suleri, Sara. Meatless Days. U of Chicago P, 1991. ISBN 0-226-77981-5

Memoir of life in postcolonial Pakistan. An account of the lives of women and the effects of partition on one family. Suleri contemporizes the lives on Pakistani women postpartition and attempts to reconcile her own experience moving to the west.

FICTION

Butalia, Urvashi and Ritu Menon, eds. In Other Words: New Writing by Indian Women. Kali for Women, 1992. ISBN 81-85107-48-3

Innovative post-independence women's voices in 14 stories. Not a translation, original English. Includes very brief notes on contributing authors.

Chughtai, Ismat. The Crooked Line. Kali for Women, 1995. ISBN 81-85107-55-6

Psychological novel about the core of the female, Muslim, Indian psyche. A study of custom and ritual in middle class Muslim society by India's first Muslim woman to gain a BA and a degree in teaching.

Chughtai, Ismat. The Heart Breaks Free & The Wild One: Two Novellas.

Kali for Women, 1993. ISBN 81-85107-70-X

As nature abhors a vacuum, Indian society abhors a single woman. Novella 1 looks at two single women and their coping mechanism. Novella 2 characterizes middle class morality and its throttling of young love across class boundaries.

Desai, Anita. Games at Twilight. Penguin, 1982. ISBN 0-14-01-1907-8

Collection of stories about contemporary urban of India. Desai is the recipient of widespread critical acclaim in west as well as in native India for the clear vision of modern Indian life she paints.

Devi, Jyotirmoyee. The River Churning: A Partition Novel. Kali for Women, 1995. ISBN 81-85107-69-6

The story of the effects of partition on a Brahmin girl forever polluted by being sheltered in a Muslim family. Comments on the partition, marginalization of women, patriarchal obsession with women's sexual purity.

Gokhale, Namita. Gods, Graves and Grandmother. Rupa, 1994. ISBN 81-7167-246-9

Novel set in Bihar of daughter, mother and grandmother who flee small town scandal and disgrace.

Gupta, Sunetra. The Glassblower's Breath. Penguin, 1993. ISBN 0-14-023674-0

Novel of an urban woman struggling with the contradiction of her own need for experience and the desire of men in her life to capture and define her. Though born in Calcutta, Gupta has lived most of her life outside India.

Hameed, Syeda S. and Sughra Mehdi, trans. Parwaaz: Urdu Short Stories by Women. Kali for Women, 1996. ISBN 81-85107-40-8

Collection of *afsanas*, short fiction, from a century of progressive Urdu women's writings. Includes a scholarly introduction and brief biography with photo of each author.

Indira, M.K. Phaniyamma. Kali for Women, 1994. ISBN 81-85107-09-2

Novelized story of Karnataka child widow who lived to 112. Recounts the story of the reality of widowhood in a culture that regards it as the ultimate pollution.

Inner Spaces: New Writing by Women from Kerala. Kali for Women, 1993. ISBN 81-85107-43-2

Varied selection from 1930s to present including established authors and new voices. Voices reflect concerns of contemporary feminist issues of India couched in particulars of Kerala. Includes scholarly introduction with valuable background on the state of Kerala.

Kamani, Ginu. Junglee Girl. Penguin, 1995. ISBN 0-14-025481-1

Collection of Gujarati stories of women's sensual and sexual awakening through a complex social world which strives to exclude them. Kamani is educated and lives in America, giving stories some westernized flavor.

Mehta, Dina. Miss Menon Did Not Believe in Magic and Other Stories.

Rupa, 1994. ISBN 81-7167-144-6

Stories of a class cross-section of contemporary urban women. Theme of possibilities restricted by embalmed tradition. Suggest that women moved by frustration of restraint become a powerful force of social change.

Nambisan, Kavery. The Scent of Pepper. Penguin, 1996. ISBN 0-14-026443-4

A novel of family strength set in remote Kodagu, modern day Karnataka. A family struggles within its own clan and clashes with the new British raj. The story of a fierce, independent race.

Namjoshi, Suniti. Feminist Fables: Saint Suniti & the Dragon. Penguin, 1995. ISBN 0-14-025595-8

Retelling of ancient myths, legends and fairy tales from east and west through a contemporized feminist mythology. Explores with wit and humor the concepts of decency, honor and sainthood.

Ramanujan, A.K., trans. Speaking of Siva. Penguin, 1973. ISBN 0-14-04-4270-7

Collection of *vacanas*, free verse lyrics, by four saints of the bhakti movement originated in the 10th century. Includes poems by Mahadeviyakka, 12th century devote of Siva forced into tainting marriage with uninitiate chieftain.

Swaminathan, Kalpana. Cryptic Death and Other Stories. Disha, 1997.

ISBN 81-250-1120-X

A maiden collection of who-dun-its in new tradition of female sleuths. Aunt Lalli, retired police clerk, solves twelve murder mysteries.

Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita. Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present.

Vol. I: 600 B.C. to the Early 20th Century. Oxford UP, 1995. ISBN

0-19-563195-1

First volume of an exhaustive anthology of writing by women across the breadth of the subcontinent and the scope of history. Includes important scholarly introduction specific to volume.

Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita. Women Writing in India: 600 B.C. to the Present.

Vol. II: The 20th Century. Oxford UP, 1995. ISBN 0-19-563219-2

Second volume of an exhaustive anthology of writing by women across the breadth of the subcontinent and the scope of history. Includes important scholarly introduction specific to volume.

The Slate of Life: An Anthology of Stories by Indian Women. Kali for

Women, 1990. ISBN 81-85107-21-1

Collection of stories by contemporary, important, innovative writers from many languages groups and regions. Captures the universality of the Indian woman's struggle from individual tales separated by place, class and background.

Syllabus:

Unit 1: Perspecitives--history, culture, geography, social setting

- slide show: religion, work, living
- artifacts: fabric/clothing, paper, puppets, food

Suggested Readings: Bumiller, Ghandi & Shah, Jung, Kumar, Kabeer, Nabar, Pande, Suleri

Unit 2: Readings: Thematic Approach

- domestic literature = the family vs. heroic woman tales
- woman as physical or psychic outcast
- male/female relations = negotiations that are central to women's lives
- violence & temperance
- environmental ecology
- legal concerns

Suggested Readings: Varied selections from fiction bibliography as fits the instructor's predilections and restraints.

Unit 3: Feminist Criticism

- Occidental model
- Oriental model

Suggested Readings: Bhasin & Khan, Ghandi & Shah, Jung, Kabeer, Kumar, Nabar